



January 30, 2004

New York City man is sentenced for his role in Central Falls cocaine-trafficking conspiracy

A federal judge today sentenced **Francisco Bermudez**, 32, of Queens, New York, to 10 years in federal prison for his role in a cocaine-trafficking conspiracy that was based in Central Falls. Federal drug task force agents arrested Bermudez, **Shawn Montegio**, of Central Falls, and an alleged coconspirator in a Central Falls apartment last February. Agents seized nine kilograms of cocaine at the apartment and a total of about \$350,000 in cash at several locations. The Office of the United States Attorney announced the sentence, which U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith imposed today in U.S. District Court, Providence. Bermudez has been detained without bail since his arrest on February 9, 2003.

In July, Bermudez pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy. At the plea hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers said that agents of the **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force** had been investigating Montegio's suspected drug trafficking for several months. On February 9, 2003, agents set up surveillance outside Montegio's home at 45 Claremont Street and, at approximately 7:00 PM, observed Bermudez and another man arrive in a car bearing Virginia license plates. A short time later, Bermudez carried a duffel bag into the apartment.

At approximately 8:30 PM, agents entered the apartment and found Montegio, Bermudez and **Gonzolo Velasquez**, also of Queens, NY, in the kitchen. They seized \$115,000 in cash

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and approximately nine kilograms of cocaine that Bermudez had brought in the duffel bag and which had been repackaged for resale. Executing search warrants at other locations, agents seized an additional \$236,000.

Bermudez pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, and one count of possessing with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine.

Montegio has also pleaded guilty to a series of charges, including cocaine trafficking and possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug-trafficking offense. Montegio had a handgun on him when agents entered his apartment. He is detained pending sentencing.

Montegio's companion, **Maria Benavides**, owned the house at 45 Claremont Street but in October Judge Smith ordered it forfeited to the government because it had been used to facilitate drug trafficking. She is appealing that ruling. On January 14, a federal grand jury indicted Benavides for her alleged role in the drug trafficking conspiracy. She has pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and aiding and abetting the possession with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine.

The case is being investigated by the HIDTA Task Force, which is led by the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** and the **Rhode Island State Police**. Participating in the Task Force investigation are detectives from the **Central Falls, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, and Woonsocket Police Departments**. The **Rhode Island National Guard** provides administrative support to the HIDTA Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Rogers and Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden are prosecuting the case.